

*The Gateway Mile Video Campaign:  
Communicating with Clients, Civic Leaders, and Ourselves*

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

*Mitch Hannon*

*&*

*Nick Rieth*

**Thesis Advisor**

*Nancy Carlson*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Carlson". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

**Ball State University**

**Muncie, Indiana**

*February 2015*

**Expected Date of Graduation**

*May 2015*

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## Abstract

Our project sought to investigate the process of undertaking and producing a video campaign for the Elkhart County Convention and Visitor's Bureau, but at its core, was about one key element: communication. Throughout this journal of our experiences, we discuss the effort of bringing a marketing campaign to life through video, and the facets of communication that are a part of this process.

We begin by recounting how we started working with our client, and how further correspondence developed our relationship from producing a single project into a full video campaign. We retell conversations that grew ideas and themes into a full marketing message. We discuss interacting with clients in a professional context, and we reveal our methods of interacting with civic leaders and business owners to tell their stories. Our production process is laid bare and explained in its issues and efficiencies, and we detail the editing process that refined raw stories and thoughts into messages of hope, success, and pride. We reflect on when communication became fuzzy, leading to extra work, stress, and uncertainty, and how this pushed us to rethink, rebuild, and refine our messaging. Finally, we conclude with how our communication has continued with our client and how we've grown to become better businessmen and storytellers through our experiences.

## Acknowledgements – Mitch Hannon

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau for the opportunity to be a part of this amazing project. Without the support and trust of Denise Hernandez and Diana Lawson, this project could not have become a reality. I am grateful that they went out on a limb to trust Nick and I in 2013 and have continued to work with us as we've grown.

I must also thank Nick Rieth for working by my side on all sorts of projects for the past four years. I have had wonderful times working on the projects mentioned here, but I will always have fond memories of the mind-blowing, outrageous silliness that we've kept close at hand during all situations. Production is hard work, but Nick and I have found a rhythm that keeps it rewarding as well as entertaining.

Mrs. Nancy Carlson has been an incredible teacher, mentor, and advisor throughout the development of this thesis, and I can't imagine having reached this quality of work without her assistance. While many teachers help solve problems, Nancy has helped us preempt them. Where other mentors may guide a *project*, she has guided *us*. Although every advisor gives advice, Nancy has not limited it to the scope of our thesis, and has helped us grow as young professionals. She is leaving big shoes to fill in her retirement from Ball State.

The support of my family has been invaluable throughout this project. Aside from the financial support of my education, my parents laid the groundwork for the skills I now possess. They've taught me professionalism, hard work, and kindness, but most importantly they let me run around with a video camera making silly videos from an early age. My fiancée Carleigh has been a source of comfort and joy through the often-tumultuous



journey of higher education, and her support is directly responsible for my success. Joe, my not-so-little brother, has been blessed with an intellect beyond my own, which has inspired me to keep pushing forward.

I did not enter Ball State University equipped to tackle a project such as this. In addition to the aforementioned Nancy Carlson, I've received amazing instruction and guidance from Phil Bremen, Dom Caristi, Mike Gerhard, Miao Guo, Stacy Slavin, Suzy Smith, Sue Tschuor, Paige Waters, Sonny Wingler, and Barry Umansky in the Telecommunications department, who have helped me build and shape my skills. From the Economics and Honors departments I would like to thank Cecil Bohanon and Beth Dalton respectively for their inspiring instruction, as well as the Dean and Associate Dean of the Honors College, Jim Ruebel and John Emert for their instruction and guidance. These men and women, along with numerous others, are the reason Ball State University is one of the best universities in the nation.

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### **Author's Statement – Mitch Hannon**

The amount that I have accomplished to make this thesis a reality is staggering. At a glance, I see eight videos that were completed and received the final blessing of a client. To the general public, this seven minutes of video barely scratches the surface of daily media consumption. To someone skilled in video production, this amount of content indicates significant work and dedication, but hardly more than an average project. For me, however, the Gateway Mile Campaign was a shift in how I viewed success and growth.

Prior to this project I had never truly faced failure. I had faced tight deadlines, which led to tense moments but always ended in success. Many times I was unsure of how to handle myself in a professional context, but things always came out fine. I had a mostly-successful formula for how to use video to meet a marketing goal. With months separating me from the final delivery of content for the Gateway Mile Campaign, I can say that the end result of our work was success, but I didn't just brush with failure, I lived it.

During the course of this project I had my editing agility, professional attitude, and creative approach seriously tested. Nick and I had been known for our quick turnaround time, but an unprecedented amount of footage caught us by surprise. As my work failed to meet expectations multiple times in a row I held my composure but felt extreme frustration and voiced this to those close to me. And as I looked back upon all that had fallen short, I realized the amount of creative control that we could have had but surrendered in the name of cordial relationships.

At the core of all my failure was a lack of sufficient and effective communication. I learned that communicating ideas with multiple speakers takes longer than fifteen seconds. I learned that goals and vision can never be too defined, and that greater direction leads to

exponentially greater content. I learned that clients, through no fault of their own, don't necessarily have a perfect vision for how to deliver a marketing message. Most importantly, I learned that I *do*, in fact, have creative ideas that are worth defending.

In my three semesters as president of Cardinal Filmworks, an extra-curricular video production club at Ball State, I encouraged my fellow students to face failure without fear. I told them that failure would eventually happen, but failure in an extracurricular club would have negligible effect on their lives. Initially when I spoke these words I was merely paraphrasing sage advice from a plethora of sources; I had no personal claim or understanding of its meaning aside from basic logic. When I found myself sitting in a room with a client who was disappointed in the work I had placed before them—not just in part, but almost in entirety—I learned the true significance of the advice I'd mindlessly recited. I had faced the insufficiencies I'd told my colleagues to embrace, and I wished it could have been a simple student film.

As I return my gaze to the roughly seven minutes of video that Nick and I produced for the Gateway Mile Campaign, I do not, however, see failure. Despite the fact that, several weeks into post-production, only thirty seconds was client-approved, we did not give up. We developed a style of video the client hadn't expected but found to be inventive and useful. We redoubled our efforts to communicate, not just with the client and each other, but also with the viewers of our videos. Of our seven minutes of content, six came directly from our initial failure to become our success and growth as professionals. I will never seek to fail, and I will always work to improve communication, but I have learned how to turn times where I fall short into opportunities for growth.

## A History

We both entered Ball State University as freshmen in the fall semester of 2011, eager to take advantage of the rich opportunity presented by the nationally renowned Telecommunications program in the College of Communication, Information, and Media. Nick Rieth was a graduate of Goshen High School, entering with experience in capturing video for news broadcast and a knack for alternative storytelling such as stop-motion. Mitch Hannon, a graduate of Elkhart Central High School, brought experience in producing commercials and going through video production at a lightning pace. These experiences had been limited to one or two simple projects, but had established skills that would remain useful throughout our time at Ball State.



*Our humanities sequence masterpiece: "It's Seldom Sunny in Ithaca"*

Our collaboration began not with a Telecommunications course, however, but due to the Honors College. For a final project in the humanities sequence, we united forces with each other for the first time,

working with other students to create an 18-minute, special-effects-laden re-envisioning of the *Odyssey* in the form of a British sitcom. The completed product was, in hindsight, only mildly entertaining despite an abundance of classical references, but the experience of working together prompted a partnership that would last for years to come.

Since our first semester, we have worked together on dozens of productions of various scope and relevance. From facetious original works to campaign commercials for

student government slates, we have worked together not just for the valuable experience, but because it has been, simply put, quite fun. During the second half of our sophomore year, we embarked on a new adventure when we began working for clients in a professional context. This was facilitated through our close proximity to each other both on campus and at home, as a 30-minute drive was all that separated our collaborative talents when we returned to our home region of Elkhart County.

Our first client was Elkhart Community Schools. We completed several commercials for them and received high plaudits for our work. This success spurred our eagerness to do more work, so we set ambitious goals heading into the summer months of 2013. We chose not to pursue full-time employment at other jobs, as our zeal for commercial production and the wealth of experience we expected to gain far outweighed our desire to maintain consistent work.

By the end of the semester, we had found guaranteed work with two entities in our home county. For Elkhart Community Schools, we were set to film and document a service-oriented celebration. For the United Way of Elkhart County, we were set to produce a few simple commercials aimed at young adults. After completing the work we had set out to accomplish, a new potential client contacted us: the Elkhart County Convention and Visitor's Bureau, (frequently abbreviated as the CVB.) As Mitch stood in the break room of his supermarket job, the CVB communicated their wishes; there was a fast-approaching press conference, and they wanted a 3-minute video to take the place of multiple (potentially monotonous) speeches. Between Mitch's shifts at the supermarket and Nick's shifts as a drill press operator, our equipment that we'd only recently acquired was put to use.

The project went smoothly; we were attempting to promote the downtown of Elkhart, Indiana, and as we were both natives of the area, it meant promoting our home. The marketing plan behind this initial



*Downtown Elkhart, IN as seen in the SoMa Campaign Video*

project was titled SoMa: Supporting Our Main Assets; it was a campaign to build interest in Downtown Elkhart from business owners and the general public alike. Denise Hernandez, the director of marketing at the CVB, was instrumental in organizing brief interviews with a plethora of downtown business owners and community leaders. The CVB provided a list of a few short questions, but we supplemented these with conversational questions of our own. Amazed with the quality of the unedited conversations, we excitedly went into editing. In under a week, we turned in a video that still receives praise today.



*The SoMa Logo*

The SoMa Campaign Video was one of our first videos that gave us a sense of production success. Screenshots appeared in the local paper, we heard it complimented by

complete strangers, and it garnered nonstop praise from the CVB. Unlike many of our productions, which were of professional technical quality, the SoMa Campaign Video had that intrinsic, impossible-to-quantify quality which stood among campaigns designed by



those with better equipment and more than two years of college. With this production wrapped, we immediately dove into our third year at Ball State, and our contact with the CVB all but ceased.



## **Pre-Production**

There are three main components to video production: pre-production, production, and post-production. While their names imply extreme similarity, these processes are each crucial to the success in very separate and significant ways in any video undertaking of any scope. Leaving out one of these three key processes doesn't necessarily spell death for a project, but it creates an almost insurmountable barrier to success.

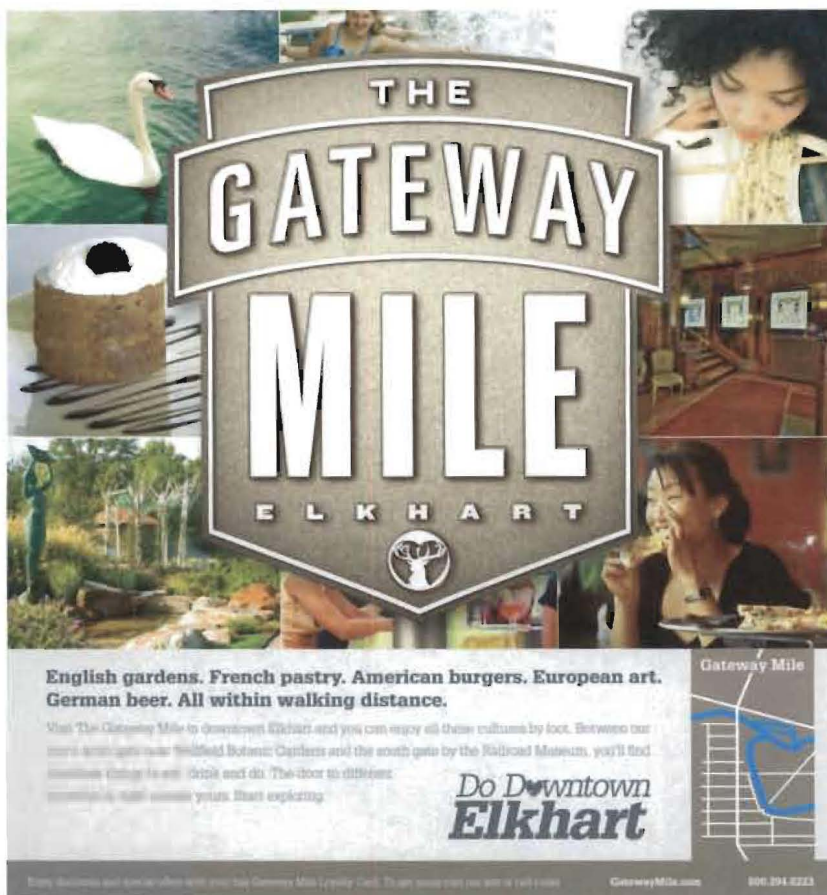
Pre-production is the process of preparing to capture an event, stage action, or animate a scene. When a script is being used, it is during pre-production that it is written and revised. This is when sets are built or locations are scouted. It is when interview subjects are selected and actors are chosen. Equipment is acquired, and plans are made. Even a father recording a child's first steps must engage in pre-production by choosing to use his phone or a dedicated camcorder. In film and commercial production, pre-production is critical to the success of a project; glossing over it or skipping over it altogether can lead to extreme difficulty, often causing the project's participants to become thoroughly and completely tired of it.

In early January 2014, we met with Denise Hernandez and Diana Lawson, director of the CVB. Our purpose for this meeting was to get advice on a project we were considering: a documentary about the recent economic changes in Elkhart County. They were supportive, but made elusive references to another project that would be coming down the pipeline and may involve our services. While the documentary project was eventually scrapped, our renewed conversation with the CVB continued.

On February 18, Denise contacted us regarding our availability during spring and summer months. She mentioned a countywide project, which piqued our interest. Still

somewhat reeling from the success of the SoMa Campaign Video, we looked forward to another chance at critical acclaim. As we conversed, she also mentioned a possibility in once again promoting Downtown Elkhart with video. We said we were interested, and agreed to keep in touch.

During our spring break in the first week of March, pre-production began. We met with Denise and Diana in person at the CVB to discuss the new branding campaign for Downtown Elkhart—the Gateway Mile. This phrase was meant to invoke the density of activity and opportunity in a 1.6-mile stretch of Main Street, and we began to discuss how we might advertise this activity and opportunity to the community. Even though we knew our goal would be to construct a comprehensive set of video components illustrating the Gateway Mile, the campaign's scale required us to carefully assess the task laid before us.



*Sample promotional graphic for The Gateway Mile*

First, we addressed the features of the campaign. In addition to the new term for Main Street being the “Gateway Mile,” the CVB showed us a set of graphics options provided to them by their contracted ad agency, Axiom Port. These included billboards, newspaper ads, and other graphical assets that were meant to inspire confidence and curiosity about what Downtown Elkhart has to offer. Our videos were meant to complement these ads to create a comprehensive campaign, meeting consumers along all formats and media. We suggested that some of the potential newspaper ads could be slightly rephrased, but that, in general, the idea was inspired and could definitely work. We especially liked the Gateway Mile Loyalty Card, a concept that Elkhart residents and visitors could obtain a card that would ensure deals and discounts at participating downtown businesses.

Next, we moved on to the various video pieces and formats that the CVB wanted us to produce. One piece was going to be an informational video about the Loyalty Card, being a minute or two in length and appearing on the main page of the Gateway Mile website. This video would inform visitors about the existence of the card and its benefits, ending with a call to sign up for one. Another type of video desired by the CVB was a set of 30-second commercials advertising different aspects of the Gateway Mile. As a variation on the standard 30-second commercial, we also discussed the possibility of having pairs of 15-second commercials, totaling 30 seconds. This way, part of a message could appear at the beginning of a commercial break, and the message could be repeated with a call to action as viewers return to their programming. We warned that these could be tricky to perfect given the strict length of editing to only 15 seconds, but we were confident we could use this limitation to encourage creativity.

Finally, we began to discuss the logistics of production. The goal for the campaign kickoff was June 1, but our first day of availability was May 2. This window for production was more concerning for Denise and Diana than it was for us since fast turnaround was one of our specialties, as they'd experienced working with us in the past. We assured them that a four-week production window provided ample time. Another topic discussed was that of the commercial subjects; we mentioned that our promise of quick turnaround was dependent on casting assistance from the CVB, and Denise happily agreed to assist in arranging several shooting days for the first full week of May.

The precise content of the commercials was left in the air at the time, although the general topics of the arts, dining, and nature were introduced. Denise and Diana offered the idea of having a restaurant server and a bartender speak, citing local examples of pleasant-to-dine-with restaurant employees. With two months until the beginning of production, we had little concern about this lack of ironclad direction for the videos; we had been given a lot of new branding information, and any serious scripting or planning needed to come after we had a chance to digest the campaign's core concepts. At the end of the meeting, we agreed to digitally receive and examine branding documents, then provide commercial scripts for approval.

At the beginning of pre-production, we had plans to produce:

- (3) 30-second commercials
- (3) Paired sets of 15-second commercial bookends
- (1) Informational video explaining the Loyalty Card

The videos we planned to produce would include:

- Arts
- Nature
- Dining
- A Bartender
- A Restaurant Server



*The Gateway Mile Loyalty Card*

As our spring break ended, we thought back to this meeting, and valued the creative freedom we'd been given. The Gateway Mile concept had little more substance in its details than the SoMa campaign, and the only topical requests by the CVB sounded fun and exciting to include. We independently thought about ways to address some of these topics, and agreed to split the scriptwriting workload—Nick chose two bookends and one normal-length commercial, while

Mitch chose to write one bookend pair and two normal-length commercials.

Within a few days, Nick had written three solid scripts, and Mitch had written one solid script, one open-ended script, and had an alternative idea for his third. Nick had one script about the natural beauty of Downtown Elkhart, one featuring a waiter recommending the various food options in Elkhart, and one with a bartender discussing the culture and diversity of his clientele. Mitch's solid script focused on the newly renovated city theater, while his other had open-ended sentences for an interview subject regarding the art scene and opportunities in Downtown Elkhart. His final idea was for a compilation



of sounds related to the consumption of beverages to be organized into a musical medley that exhibited the different types of dining experiences available. This assortment of scripts and ideas was sent to the CVB along with a request for feedback on April 11.

The following day, Denise let us know that she had received our scripts and would be reviewing them. Much to our surprise, Denise contacted us on April 15 with praise but also concern regarding the scripts. She informed us that Diana wanted to have a variety of voices in each of the spots, and the scripts as written were not clearly along these lines; they were curious about if we would have multiple speakers and voices in each script. This rejection of our work was relatively easy to handle; we knew we had fairly limited experience in commercial production, and we wanted our client to remain pleased. Our immediate reaction to this criticism was an assurance of flexibility; we told Denise that, although each script might have six lines, a different individual could speak each of them. This would allow us to use our carefully written scripts, but also meet the CVB's desire to show many voices and faces of the campaign.

Our expectation upon issuing this suggestion was that it would settle their criticism; however, it was instead met with additional comment. Denise explained that the CVB wanted to have many interviews of those involved with the project, and we made a further concession that each of the scripted lines could be cut at its introductory phrase and serve as an open-ended sentence. These concessions were necessary and seemed to be benign, but would prove to be problematic later. With this light pre-production change, our entire production process shifted focus. By switching from an explicitly defined script to implicitly defined expectation of interview responses, the very nature of how we sold the Gateway Mile became dependent on interview responses, not carefully pre-written lines.

As March faded into April, production edged closer by the day. During our meeting with the CVB and discussions with each other, we had decided that acquiring at least one time-lapse of the Lerner Theater, a major Elkhart landmark, would be instrumental in the campaign. This, of course, required a full or nearly full theater. While the newly-renovated facility was indeed photogenic and a genuinely pleasant space for events and shows, the size of the town and scale of most events meant that between the present time and our June 1 goal there would be a limited number of sellout shows.

One of these opportunities was a performance of the band STYX on April 3, a Thursday evening. The show was sure to be a sellout, but presented a problem—both of us had classes on both Thursday and Friday, and while the three-hour drive to Elkhart would have been feasible, it seemed hardly worthwhile, given that it would have amounted to six hours of travel for approximately two hours on set and under an hour of actual filming time. This was complicated by the fact that any footage of the actual band would fall into legally adventurous territory; sound recordings were outright unlawful, but filming silent footage of the crowd would potentially be usable.

Over the course of a few phone calls with Denise, we expressed these concerns, acknowledging that footage of audience members in the Lerner would be absolutely necessary, but that it didn't need to be from the STYX concert. Consulting the theater's schedule, Denise suggested a May 2 show of *Les Misérables* by the theater's resident company. It was our last day of finals, but we were confident that we could make it to Elkhart in time for the show. Denise also suggested that the crowd in the shots might be closer in age to the campaign's target demographic since the cast would be a wide age range of individuals from the community. While we would have loved to get Lerner footage

taken care of sooner, we reassured ourselves that our inconvenient geography would only be a hindrance in this instance.

With plans for the necessary shots in the Lerner essentially set, we continued planning through April. On April 4 we received a shot wish list from Denise meant to provide us with general direction for shots and interviews. We glanced over the list periodically when planning; we knew that, with up to 20 interviews planned for the project, our ability to gather b-roll (footage that plays over audio from interviews to evoke the emotions described or implied by those interviews) would be planned less around the “perfect shot” and more around what we could capture at each location.

In the week leading up to our May 2 shoot at the Lerner, it became clear that, as with our previous work for the CVB, interviews were heavily desired. We communicated with Diana regarding our arrival, footage to gather, and those who should be interviewed (and when.) Our primary contact at the Lerner was David Smith, the theater’s director. As our shooting window for the entire project was rather small, we also discussed the possibility of recording video at a nearby bar during the show if time permitted.

As pre-production neared an end, we felt that we had a solid base of direction, freedom with which to work, and plenty of time to complete our work. Through our interactions with our client, we had learned that the CVB wanted many interviews with many speakers, which we would cut to provide a marketing message. We would also be gathering footage from many shops and venues throughout the Gateway Mile between the aforementioned interviews. We were excited to talk with community business owners and leaders, ask them about their stories, and cut the resulting comments into appealing commercials. The idea of pairing our sales writing and marketing experience with the



passion of local business leaders and entrepreneurs was stimulating. It had worked for us before with the same client; we felt it was merely a matter of increasing footage intake and producing a larger amount of product, albeit in smaller pieces. We had direction for several general ideas, but were encouraged to work with unscripted interview remarks to shape specific pieces. Lastly, we had over three times the editing time we'd had for our last project of this type with the CVB—and no part-time jobs to take us from our work. We were very excited to begin, and we were optimistic that we could complete our work efficiently and to our highest quality of work thus far.

## Production

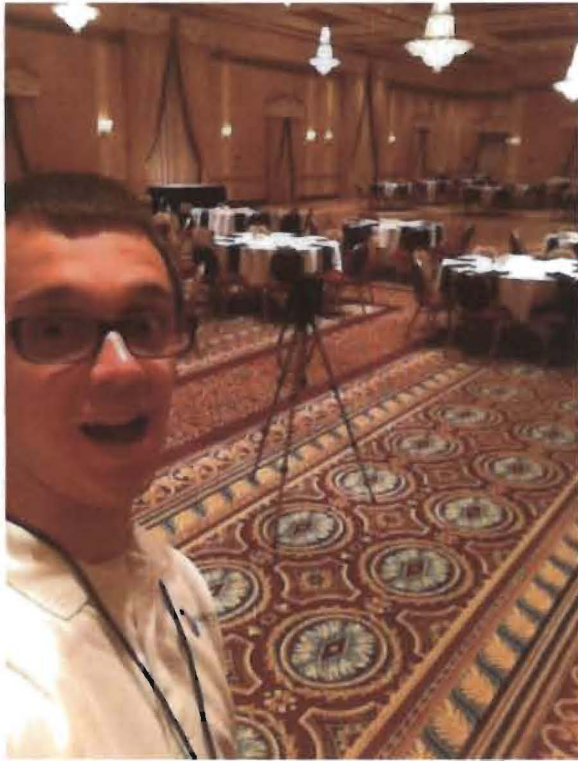
While we both enjoy the entire process of planning, capturing, editing, and ultimately creating video content, the production stage is perhaps one of our favorites. There are times when it can be the most stressful, and it may not always seem to be the most rewarding, but it is often the most exciting and creative portion of making a video.

In general, **Production** may be thought of as the process of filming all of the events and scenes as well as recording all of the audio necessary to complete the finished video product. It involves everything from setting up shots to interviewing individuals to capturing room tone (the natural ambiance of a space) to filming staged scenes. Accordingly, principal photography is the main phase of production where the majority of the footage and audio are recorded, with second-unit production being the term for the additional gathering of video and audio, re-shoots and make-up shoots, and anything else that does not fall into the main timeframe of principal photography.

Our first official day of production was also our last day of school for the semester, and our last day as juniors at Ball State. Thus, on Friday, May 2, we left campus and headed back to Elkhart in order to begin filming some b-roll, several interviews, and hopefully one of the 30-second bookends at Downtown Elkhart's Lerner Theatre. The Lerner Theatre is a wonderful hallmark of a bygone era, a refurbished and revitalized classic theatre filled with beautiful ornamentations and a real pipe organ. That night we would be filming actors and musicians preparing for the performance of *Les Miserables*, presented by Premiere Arts, a local theatre group.

We arrived at the theatre early in order to make sure that everything was prepared. We first met with David Smith, the General Manager of the building. He detailed what

would be happening that evening and let us store our equipment in his office. Next, we visited with Denise Hernandez and began scoping out possible locations for filming interviews with actors and ushers, as well as the beginning and ending of the performance. It may be noted that we shot little of the performance itself, as we could only use the video and not the audio. Using the audio would have been a copyright violation of the musical, and would not have boded well for any of the parties involved.



*Mitch preparing to gather some b-roll*

The actual shoot went quite nicely, as we employed a camera technique that we would go on to use for the remainder of the production process. To film all that we needed, we each used a DSLR camera equipped with a different lens: one had a medium telephoto lens good in low light, the other, a wide-angle zoom (or sometimes a telephoto zoom) good for all purpose shooting. This way, we were each able to capture different types of shots, providing us with more versatile and

interesting footage. We are both able to use each type of lens equally well, meaning that we could trade off cameras and lenses as the shoot called for it without disrupting the feel of the footage.

Ultimately, we were able to film almost everything that we needed from the actors, musicians and the ushers. While we ended up forgoing capturing the scripted material from the planned 30-second bookend, we were able to gather behind-the-scenes material,

patrons shopping and conversing during intermission, a time-lapse of the theatre filling up, and we even managed to slip out during the beginning of the second act in order to film at a restaurant across the street. Filming at this restaurant proved to be a slightly messier situation, though.

As a part of the contract that we had negotiated with the CVB, they agreed to be responsible for obtaining releases to film at the desired locations. This had been arranged in full force at the Lerner Theatre, but across the street at the restaurant where we were shooting, a blanket release for our filming had fallen through the cracks. We were negotiating this release with the restaurant managers and some of its customers, choosing to shoot angles without people, when one customer saw our cameras and began threatening us with lawsuit. We quickly showed this individual that we had no clips of him whatsoever, but even with our innocence, we could sense that he found our presence disgruntling. As such, we decided to return to this restaurant to film at a later date.

The rest of the evening went well and ended without much ordeal. After packing up our gear, we made plans for ingesting and cataloging footage and parted ways (our



*Vlogging after our first night of filming*

methodology for this ingestion is discussed in **Post-Production – Part 1**). Nick came back the next day and finished filming at the restaurant from the night before. While downtown, he was also able to gather

footage from a Cinco de Mayo festival taking place at that time, a stroke of luck that provided us with even more b-roll to utilize in the future.

We next met on Monday, May 5. That day was dedicated to gathering Foley in Mitch's kitchen for our musical piece. Foley is audio that will be used for sound effects and other related audio purposes. To create our Foley, we borrowed wine glasses and other assorted dishware from Mitch's parents. We spent about two hours recording various cups and glasses clinking, corks popping, silverware chinking, and glasses being filled. Both of us took the sounds in order to try and create the song out of them that we had in mind for one of the spots, but it was actually some time before they were used to produce a tangible product.

Tuesday was our first main shooting day. We met with Denise Hernandez around noon and prepared to venture throughout the Gateway Mile collecting the necessary b-roll, interviews, and action shots. We began the shooting at a restaurant named The Vine. We had planned to film a portion of one of the 30 second bookend commercials here, using a waiter to act for us and then getting some b-roll of him serving several customers. We tried this, but while the waiter was wonderful at what he did, he also was not an actor. It was at this point that we discovered we would have to modify our approach to the shoots. While we had gone into this campaign with scripted dialogue in mind, our exchange of glances and sighs confirmed that we now knew that interviews would have to be the bread and butter of our commercials.

As much as this realization changed our plans, it did not shake our confidence. Perhaps our greatest area of expertise is in the realm of interview shoots, as we have an established system that allows us to work in fluid tandem. While one of us is getting the



equipment ready and the shot set up, the other will discuss questions with the interviewee, that he or she need not look into the camera, and how we will edit out any mistakes. Once the equipment is in place and the interviewee mic'd, we can capture the interview. While one of us talks with the subject and asks him or her questions, the other will monitor the main camera, operate a second camera, and/or monitor the audio. We had found gold using candid, quick interviews before; we were quite certain that we could do so once again.



*Relaxing on Tuesday's lunch break*

The rest of that Tuesday went smoothly, and we even ended up receiving some free food along the way. By the end of day, though, we knew that we could have a long road ahead of us. Throughout the course of our shoot, we had realized what was going to happen with our products; namely, how what we had pitched to the CVB and what they had planned for us to create were two very different types of commercials. We should have realized this sooner, but perhaps in our willingness to let

the CVB do the heavy lifting and organize the video shoots, we allowed this fact to slip by us. We also realized that the fundamental differences between what the CVB had set up for us to film and what we had in mind that we were going to film could lead to problems with the commercials' messages. Still, we had to do our best to try to meet the needs and ultimate goals of our client.

While this revelation was by far the largest of our day, we managed to learn two more things that Tuesday, one about our equipment and the other about the Gateway Mile campaign itself. As for our equipment, we learned the importance of regularly checking on its health. Generic camera batteries only last about two years, and ours were reaching the end of their lives. We were lucky to have enough juice to complete our long production days, but we could have been in real trouble if our cameras died during an interview and we had no way to power them. One should always check and double check his or her gear in order to make sure that it will suffice for the shoot at hand.

The second thing that we learned came from two proprietors whom we had interviewed. They explained to Denise that they had concerns over the direction of the CVB and the Gateway Mile. They felt that other areas of downtown revitalization, such as its cleanliness and beautification, could have been addressed before a cohesive branding effort was needed. These specific concerns were not voiced near us again, but throughout the campaign, other similar factors would rear their heads, ultimately impacting our work with the CVB.

Wednesday went much better than Tuesday. We received no free food, but we also encountered no unpleasant surprises. We felt prepared and were able to gather everything that we needed, ending with high spirits and bright prospects. We were still unclear on how we would be filming the Loyalty Card spot, but we felt confident that we could finish the majority of the shoots for the commercials on Thursday and Friday.

Thursday was perhaps our busiest day of filming, and was slightly more stressful than Wednesday had been. Once again, we captured everything that we needed to get, but as we progressed, we realized more and more that we would have to be careful in how we

were going to edit the finished pieces in order to create the messages for which our client was looking. We had captured some great interviews, but they were far different from the original scripted material we had proposed to the CVB.

Friday was an interesting day and our last day of principal photography. We had two shoots scheduled for the morning, but neither of them worked out. The first was at Wellfield Botanic Gardens, which we had elected not to visit on account of the predicted rain and overcast skies. The second was a shoot at a historic home, but the house director had called in sick that day. Thus, we resorted to our second-best option and decided to gather more b-roll of various downtown shops. This went very well, as we were able to cover a lot of ground in just a few hours and broaden the scope of our footage significantly.



*Nick setting up audio on Thursday's shoot*

After that Friday, we took a hiatus from production for some time, focusing on initial footage cataloguing and editing (this is discussed in detail in **Post-Production – Part 1**). We next met on Friday, May 16, when we attended a press conference about the Gateway Mile campaign. It was at this conference that we heard another group of individuals express some distaste towards the campaign. As mentioned, the CVB had decided to utilize and Indianapolis-based marketing firm to design the branding for the Gateway Mile.



Downtown Elkhart has several marketing companies, and as such, several individuals voiced their concerns over why the CVB had chosen the firm from Indy in lieu of a local company. The CVB answered these concerns as best they could, but we knew that his public opinion could yet play a part in our work on the campaign.

It wasn't until Tuesday, May 20, that we were actually able to film at the Wellfield Botanic Gardens, the historic home, and several b-roll locations. Both the shoot at the Wellfield Botanic Gardens and at the historic home involved children. We had the expressed permission and help of the parents when filming at the gardens, so this made our jobs much easier. We were able to get close-ups and significant footage of the children. At the historic home, this was not the case. We had to refrain from capturing any distinguishing features of the children, as we could use shots of them in the video as long as they were not easily identifiable. All of these shoots went exceedingly well, and also marked the end of production. While we had enjoyed the production stage, we were both ready to be finished with it and to begin moving forward with all of the pieces in post-production.

## Post-Production – Part I

When all our footage from the Gateway Mile Project was combined, it totaled approximately ten hours. Our initial goal for finished, deliverable video was about four and a half minutes.

To say that we had a full ten hours of footage to wrangle would be only partially accurate. While it was true in file sizes, the actual total of footage that must be sifted through was closer to eight hours. Since we had two cameras recording almost all of the interviews, each minute of interview amounted to two minutes of footage; the roughly two hours of interview footage was closer to one hour that we needed to analyze.

In the beginning, the primary purpose of post-production was a practice that is of the utmost importance and is extremely easy to accomplish poorly: **file management**. Both of us were proficient editors, which was part of our secret of quick turnaround. Working with hundreds of gigabytes of files between two editors was a careful dance that we had not yet performed on such a scale. Our system of file management is anything but enthralling, but the time and thought that put it together made it one of the most valuable takeaways from the project.

Because our deliverables could potentially require any of our over 800 individual clips, we knew it would be crucial that we each work from the same library of video files. Thus, by the end of our primary week of filming, we would each need every file from our two DSLR cameras, the audio recorder, and the GoPro (which was used primarily for our self-documentation.) These files were frequently spread between five or more memory cards, making the transfer process somewhat involved. In the interest of nightly rest, we agreed to alternate the responsibility of file transfer; Mitch would ingest footage on the first

and third day of the production week, and Nick would handle it on the second and fourth. Although the production week was tiring and long, our distribution of data import worked well. At the end of the week, we synchronized our imported footage and immediately ran backups. Our primary video files were in place.

In order to edit our deliverables, we chose to use Final Cut Pro X, professional-grade editing software from Apple, Inc. While Mitch has a certification in this software, Nick is similarly proficient, both having used it for collaborative projects in the past. Final Cut Pro X (FCPX) was chosen as the editing software for a few relatively simple but incredibly significant reasons:

- Our videos would require significant manipulation of interviews, which is easier to accomplish non-destructively in FCPX.
- Many of our interviews were recorded with multiple camera angles, and we are very comfortable using FCPX's tools for cutting between angles.
- We have significant experience using FCPX for finishing touches, including audio leveling and color grading.
- FCPX outperformed competing software in automatic synchronization of our audio and video from interviews, which would make up most of each video.

The selection of editing software is akin to choosing a knife when cooking a meal. Most video editors can create the types of videos we were creating, but each type of software works best when used for a specific purpose. If the videos we were producing were of a different style, we would have chosen to use different software.

After primary production had been completed, we had two separate collections of footage (called "Libraries" in our editing software,) but before the great synchronization of

our libraries, it was decided that some footage selection should take place. The interviews were each 6-15 minutes long, half of which was interview questions, unusable comments, or silence. Therefore, we would each go through the interviews from our respective days of footage and collect a sequence of clips that consisted only of the usable sound bytes for each interview. These collections of compelling responses by our interview subjects could be transferred between us quickly, which would allow us to compile 15- and 30-second spots more quickly.

In addition to our collection of interviews, we also faced a substantial collection of video clips that highlighted the various activities, shops, museums, and places of interest along the Gateway Mile. Here, we were left with a two-way choice regarding our methodology: spend much upfront time selecting the best clips of B-Roll so that they were easily accessible, or gather B-Roll as necessitated by the editing project at hand. Combing through seven hours of footage presented a mind-numbingly arduous task at first, but we knew it would mean that future editing would only require us to look through 20-30 minutes of B-Roll. Given the vastness of our newly acquired footage library, we made a choice to spend upfront time in the interest of our future selves' sanity. Looking back, this decision was nearly perfect; without knowing the type of B-Roll that the CVB was envisioning, we used our own judgment in selecting clips.

Combing through interviews and B-Roll was the most difficult individual component of the project. Just as when one is cooking corn on the cob, the useless husks must be systematically removed, and then boiling the corn itself is quite simple. We knew the footage we needed was there, because we had each seen it whilst it was being recorded.

However, the extra, unnecessary, and unusable clips surrounding the best ones had to be pulled away and removed so that we were left with only the best moments.

While we were eager to edit our videos, the combing process was somewhat of a traffic stop. Over the course of a week and a half, we each combed the footage we had for the clips that jumped out at us as the best. As this process requires full attention to every aspect of the video clip under scrutiny, it was not only time consuming, but also mentally taxing. Editing components of a message can be efficient and even great fun for experienced editors like ourselves; it is exciting when working with four or five interviews and an hour or two of B-Roll because the story can be extracted and told quite easily. This massive volume of footage was simply staggering; we knew it could be managed, but it was exponentially more than we had ever worked with in the past.

Figuring out how to include many speakers in our pieces was another stumbling block. Each speaker had told a more-or-less complete story, but in addition to considering how each speaker's story flowed, we had to be constantly calculating how stories and statements might be woven together to illustrate our six testimonial-based commercials. Listening to individual statements we found that the majority of comments from our interviewees offered valuable testimony, but we were forced to overlook comments that didn't coordinate with those of other speakers.

Upon our eventual completion of the combing process, the great library synchronization took place. Using portable hard drives, we ensured that each of us had every single file we had captured as well as the collected sequences of our best options for both interview comments and b-roll. We then divvied up the editing workload, each taking

speakers per 15-second section of a given spot. While this was considerably trickier than the editing Nick had performed on the SoMa video due to the restrictive timeframe, both of us were able to squeeze a few great, positive comments into each spot. After cuts were made such that the speakers' words told a topic-focused marketing story, B-Roll was added to cover cuts and over the beginning and end of each commercial.

Within a few short days, we had completed rough cuts of videos that focused on five aspects of the Gateway Mile: Culture, Family, the Lerner, Dining, and Art. These examples were delivered to the CVB for review almost immediately after the editing was complete. To deliver the videos without burning through endless DVDs or trips to the CVB's location, we uploaded our rough cuts to YouTube, ensuring that the web hyperlink was publicly viewable but that searches would not reveal the video. In this way, the CVB was able to see our work, pass it along to other stakeholders, but keep it under the public radar. We submitted our links, excited to hear positive feedback on a job done well.

## Post-Production – Part II

We met with the CVB on Wednesday, May 28, in order to present our work to them. While the pieces we had given them links to were only first rough cuts, we felt that we were generally headed in the right direction and that the CVB would offer merely cursory suggestions to refine our products. We had tried to include as many speakers as we could, with the emphasis of each piece being to tell a story through what the speakers were saying. In many ways, these spots were emulations of the SoMa video, albeit in 30-second packages as opposed to the original three-minute piece.

As it turned out, our vision had not aligned with that of the CVB as well as we had hoped; we had not captured the feel of the spots that they wanted. They wanted more emotive pieces, offering doses of high energy and visual brilliance concerning the Gateway Mile. As a part of this, they also realized that they did not want as many individuals speaking throughout the spots as they initially thought. The high number of speakers had turned out to be chaotic, detracting from the message. We immediately understood where they were coming from, though it seemed curious to us why they had wanted to try and utilize so many voices in the first place. Thus, we decided to tone down each piece to having the voices of only one or two individuals.

A final point that we took away from these first cuts concerned coloring. When we sent the CVB these spots, we had not yet color-corrected them, meaning that they would watch them in all of their unsaturated and flat glory. We realized that while showing the members of the CVB these uncolored cuts would not ultimately be a problem, it would be better to show only color-corrected footage to clients in the future. They perhaps



understood that what they were viewing was unfinished, but it didn't help our cause if they couldn't visualize the improvements that coloring these pieces would bring.

Though this first meeting did not go as expected, we took it in stride and decided to buckle down, churning out our next set of spots by the following day. We made all



*A video frame uncolored (left) and colored (right)*

of the necessary changes, added coloring, polished off additional bits here and there, and sent them to the CVB. They received the spots and requested another meeting, and so with great curiosity we met with them once again on May 30, just two days after our initial assembly.

This time, the CVB had another set of revisions for us to carry out. They first detailed how they wanted us to get the most excited speakers in our pieces, not necessarily the most appropriate ones. As noted earlier, we had crafted each spot to be a cohesive story of dialogue, and thus, we had been focusing more on what was being said than how it was said. The CVB was more interested in the raw emotion of the speakers, and had two speakers in particular that they thoroughly enjoyed. Both of these speakers were bartenders, and we had actually fed one of them lines, while the other one had a history in broadcast television. With this understanding, we began to realize that it might be difficult to give the CVB the level of emotion that they wanted. We knew from our interview footage that almost all proprietors can speak candidly and earnestly about their establishments,

but only a relative few will convey this earnestness with vivid expression and high levels of emotion.

The CVB also wanted us to use better b-roll for the spots: the best of the best. We had been trying to do this, of course, but with some helpful pointers from them, we resolved to look through all of our footage and compile the very best we had to offer. As a result of this resolution, we decided to pull some footage from our library of b-roll from our previous work with them. Backing up and archiving footage is valuable for this very reason, as one may never know when he or she will have need of it in the future.



*Another video frame colored (top) and uncolored (bottom)*

Now may be a good time to mention how our previous experiences with our clients, the CVB included, had been much different than what we were currently experiencing with the CVB.

All of our previous clients had been happy with our first or second edits of each piece, and for the most part, had ever only called for minor segments to be adjusted in our work. After our first job with the CVB, they mentioned to us how rare it was for them to be so satisfied with a piece right out of the gate. Admittedly, we had been surprised with how happy they were, though we were certainly pleased that they appreciated our work. Thus, we now understood what the CVB had meant when they said that they were normally difficult to please the first time around.

Coming out of this meeting, we had very high hopes. We now felt like we truly knew what the CVB wanted, and that we would be able to give it to them. We had also come up with the idea of creating Gateway Mile “vignettes,” short one-minute videos about specific businesses that we had encountered in Downtown Elkhart. We were excited with this idea, as we knew that should the CVB like these videos, it could lead to more work for us in the immediate future. So we executed the third set of revisions on our two most promising videos, choosing the best of the best for everything, focusing on the highest quality images and speakers, ultimately aiming to give the CVB the emotion and visuals they desired. We then finished the bar medley piece, and we also each made a vignette to premiere to the CVB. On Tuesday, June 3, we once again submitted the revisions, the drink spot, and these vignettes, and we felt good about them.

### Post-Production – Part III

The next time that we conversed with the CVB was Wednesday, June 4, via phone. Throughout the entire post-production process, whenever it was not convenient to meet in person, we had been making conference calls from our respective homes in order to certify that we were on track. This call was to be no different, so we awaited their news with gusto. During our conversation, Denise Hernandez told us that due to current circumstances, they were not interested in going forward with the broadcast portion of their commercials. They said that this was not so much because they did not like the commercials, or that they were not happy with them, but rather because of the general backlash that had occurred due to the fact that the CVB had chosen the Indianapolis marketing firm over a firm from the Elkhart area.

The good news was that they really liked one of the commercials, the spot we had done on culture downtown, and that they also really liked our bar medley spot. In fact, they had nothing but praise for this spot,



*The bar medley spot included many interesting angles cut to music*

which was quite refreshing to hear. As a final note, they told us how much they liked the vignette pieces as well, and how they were interested in going forward with that idea. We were happy to do this, so together we decided to create four more of these spots in the days ahead.



Nonetheless, when the call had finished, we began wondering what had just taken place. After a month of work with the CVB, they were telling us that they only wanted two out of our initial seven spots, and that they were not going to run any of them on television, focusing on having an online presence instead. While we believed them that the recent public hubbub over their choice of marketing firm did have a part to play in this, we also felt like there was more to the story. So when we met with them once again on June 11, the last time that we would meet in person for the Gateway Mile campaign, we decided to make sure that we understood their point of view.



*An individual interviewed for one of the Gateway Mile Stories Vignettes*

came the discussion of their rationale behind their marketing choice. The CVB first elaborated the same sentiments that they had shared with us earlier on the phone. Then they went on to add one more crucial comment that summed up what both parties had learned in the process: they told us how they should have let us have creative control from the beginning. They had seen and praised our bar medley spot, and this spot made them realize what we could do under our own direction.

This revelation was a fact that we had realized as we were editing and reformatting the pieces that we had created for them. We knew that in order to get the emotion that the CVB

We had finished all of the vignettes for this meeting, and the CVB liked each and every one of them. They had minor adjustments for us to make here and there, as was the norm, but overall, they were pleased with what we had produced. Then

wanted, we should have put our foot down from the very beginning and used actors to deliver the key lines. We had been all too eager to allow them to help with our work, and we had been all too naïve to realize that this would ultimately preclude us from being able to produce the pieces that they were looking to air. The CVB had realized that their interest in running the show had also impacted our ability to create the pieces they desired, so while they cited the current public backlash as the inciting cause of why they were choosing to go a different direction, we knew that both ourselves and the CVB perhaps had an equal part to play in why the finished pieces did not come out as planned.

As we exited the meeting, we let the dust settle, realizing what we had accomplished and what we had learned. We had been able to produce content that the CVB liked and that they wanted to use. These pieces included the culture spot, the bar medley spot, as well as the six vignettes. Perhaps more important to us than these finished commercials, though, was the lesson that we had learned: that we should know when to put our foot down in the name of creative control. Looking at our work in retrospect, we realized that we should have brought in actors and filmed actual staged commercials and not run-and-gun interviews. We should have spent more time discussing our ideas with the CVB, more time preparing for the commercials that they wanted. We should have been better communicators and leaders. Many of these actions would have required a much different approach to our collaboration for the Gateway Mile campaign, but we knew that we would be prepared to make these changes in the future, whether working with the CVB or a completely new entity.

## Following Up

Our story with the CVB does not end with the Gateway Mile campaign. In fact, it continues with a much more promising endeavor. In July of that summer, we were contacted once again by Denise Hernandez. She explained to us that the CVB had a new project in mind, a series of videos highlighting the Elkhart County Heritage Trail. This trail was a major attraction for tourists, taking them through all of the best sites to see in the county. The CVB wanted us to create four or five videos showcasing the best that the Heritage Trail had to offer.

This time, there was a key difference in both parties' approach to collaboration. Denise wanted us to have almost complete control over the style, look and feel of each piece. The CVB helped us determine the length and general focus of each video, but they left the execution and creation entirely up to us.

This decision enabled us to create some of our best work for the CVB. We filmed the spots in August, finished them throughout September and sent the CVB the final copies in October. Both the



*An opening shot from one of the Heritage Trail videos*

CVB and we enjoyed the process and were very pleased with the pieces that we were able to produce as a result of our new approach to collaboration. While the Gateway Mile campaign had turned out to be primarily a learning experience, the Heritage Trail



campaign was not only an opportunity for growth, but also an experience of creative collaboration at its best.

Admittedly, our results renewed our faith in our own abilities and our relationship with the CVB. We had learned from our own history, transforming the potentially missed opportunity of the Gateway Mile campaign into a valuable lesson for both parties that ultimately proved to be a source of creative and collaborative excellence. We hope to continue to learn and grow as content producers, businessmen, and communicators like we did through our experiences with the CVB, though perhaps one of our foremost lessons could be summed up as follows: Failure is often one of the best opportunities for learning and personal growth, but learning and growing without failing is certainly quite nice.



## **Appendix**

Many of the finished videos described in this document are available to view. A DVD has been included with the physical copy of this thesis and should be available via the Ball State University Library. The videos may also be accessed online via YouTube at the following case-sensitive links:

- [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8I7K6\\_iBsdtM5L5Le2Q1tGPI6-zI3XxV](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8I7K6_iBsdtM5L5Le2Q1tGPI6-zI3XxV)
- <http://bit.ly/HannonRiethThesis>